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ABSTRACT

Community college department chairs have many diverse responsibilities. One role which needs to be given more emphasis is that of "promoting excellent teaching." The three conditions which must be present for a department chair to begin promoting excellent teaching are open, honest, and positive communication; the ability to provide immediate feedback related to job performance and especially teaching performance; and an environment in which individuals can openly accept responsibility for mistakes, with a focus on improving the system by learning from those mistakes. Among the guidelines and activities for a chair seeking to promote excellent teaching among department faculty, the following may be highlighted: (1) make teaching as meaningful as possible; (2) refrain from using excessive direction, which can lead to blind conformity and/or defiance; (3) help faculty set and attain realistic goals; (4) use praise freely; (5) transmit respect for each individual; (6) build pride in each person's own accomplishments; (7) capitalize on the strengths of individual faculty; (8) encourage self-competition; (9) promote independence and responsibility; (10) recognize sincere effort even if the end product is not great; (11) give feedback as soon as possible; (12) pay attention to areas of dissatisfaction and solicit faculty suggestions for improving such situations; (13) keep channels of communication open; (14) stress quality rather than quantity; (15) use a variety of approaches; and (16) act as a good role model for faculty. Four narrative case studies, with sample questions for group discussion among department chairs, are included. (PAA)

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PROMOTING EXCELLENT TEACHING--THE CHAIR AS ACADEMIC LEADER

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(A summary of presentation at the National Community College Chair Academy-February 1993.)

As we know from our own experience, a community college department chair plays many roles: master teacher, colleague, administrator, friend, leader, budget monitor, problem solver, committee member, counselor, change agent, etc.--all contribute either directly or indirectly to excellent teaching. But then, what is excellent teaching? When students were asked to identify the single most important characteristic of a "great teacher," the top ten characteristics identified were:

1. Stimulating style
2. clear communication
3. knows subject
4. prepared and organized
5. dynamic enthusiasm
6. personal interest
7. interactive skills
8. variety, creativity, openness
9. sound character
10. commitment

The top two were most common, and probably each of us could have duplicated a very similar if not exact list. We know what good teaching is and we know good teaching when we see it. However, we do not always have the best plan to promote quality, and we can not always bring out that quality the same way with each individual teacher.

What can the chair do to promote the "great teacher" and excellent teaching? First we need to test reality. In the ideal world, our position as chair affords us much time for individual leadership as well as team leadership. We are the guiding star, the focus of our department: NOT! We are the fire extinguisher. We push reports up ladders and try to put out the flames as they tumble to the ground. Our day is full of scheduling, faculty problems, student problems, upper administrative problems, and just normal, everyday, life problems. How much of our day is assigned to "promoting excellent teaching"? NOT ENOUGH! To be effective leaders, we cannot lose sight of the personal characteristics we need to effectively insure quality classroom performance, dedicated colleagues, department growth, and student learning.

I do not have the solution to the time management dilemma; I know I do not have enough time in my day to accomplish everything that needs to be done. Through my persistence (and indeed your's as well), job responsibilities somehow do get done and learning does go on. Through this presentation, I plan to address some of the "keys" that have worked for me. The group case studies that will follow my presentation will hopefully provide you some opportunity to apply these suggestions, or formulate better ideas that we can all share.

As an overview, let me provide a description of my basic philosophy. I believe strongly that the following three factors

need to be present before you can even begin to promote excellent teaching.

1. Communication must be open, honest, and positive.

2. Immediate feedback related to job performance and especially teaching performance must be provided.

3. Responsibility for mistakes must be openly accepted with the focus to improve the system by learning from those mistakes.

HOW CAN WE AS LEADERS HELP TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE TEACHING?

Consider carefully these several activities that have helped to make my Program one of the most successful on our campus.

Make teaching as meaningful as possible

Provide supporting resources for faculty as soon as they need them. There is nothing more frustrating than trying to plan a course without the current textbook or supplies. Make sure the room is appropriate and the schedule is well planned and thought our. Why schedule an instructor three buildings away with a five minute passing period. All you do is place a strain on student leaning and teacher interaction with students.

Promote professional growth by encouraging travel/ conference participation. I drive a van of part-time instructors to two local conferences each year. One is 25 miles away and the other is 120. We eat donuts, share student stories, and build relationships.

Encourage good role models by acknowledging accomplishments. Each year I schedule special interest group meetings where full

and part-time faculty who teach the same course come together and discuss their success and failure, assignments and students. I make it a point to send thank you notes to students who come in to complain about a grade on a paper and to teachers who are mentioned in any conversation. This activity is not much, but it personalizes my office and makes good teaching the norm rather than the exception. In turn, I affect the mental state of the department and encourage innovation and improvement. We document good activities and assignments by placing them in the "sharing" notebook for everyone to use. I also put post-it notes on each student feedback summary which lets faculty know that I do care what the students are saying, just as much as they do. In other words, teaching is important!

Don't use excessive direction for this leads to blind conformity and/or defiance. However, lack of direction leads to loss of purposeful activity and frustration, too.

Entrust your faculty so that they have control over their job responsibilities. About a year ago, I realized that my monthly program meeting information could probably be better delivered in a memo; however, I also felt that because my faculty (88 full and part-time instructors) are spread all over campus and teach a variety of schedules that it was important for us to get together as a group at least once a month. This year at our first meeting I assigned small groups to work on the agenda for each future meeting. I assigned the groups so that the individuals were of different tenures, office complexes, and

teaching schedules--basically, groups of people who do not naturally meet on a regular basis. I have just finished performance interviews and virtually every faculty member commented on how great the meetings now are. Better yet, I no longer have to create the agenda, notify the faculty, and worry about the quality. Now that's the group responsibility and they love the success oriented group competition. The meetings now have clear value and promote excellent teaching.

Help faculty set and attain realistic goals

Each year I work through several Performance Reviews and Individual Development Plans, all directed to effective goal planning for the individual teacher. To promote growth, a chair must require some goal commitment on the part of the faculty member. The goals must be written and shared at least with the two involved. More importantly, the chair needs to periodically revisit the goals to make sure there are no barriers that the chair might easily remove for the faculty member. To what extent the goals are accomplished is not as important as the instructor's commitment; the focus promotes excellent teaching.

Use praise freely

Thank people who do things for you, with you, and even to you; everyone contributes to our personal and professional growth. The more we notice the individual--their dress,

behavior, attitude, and so on.--the closer we are to their teaching and personal growth. We use the same observation skill when we teach so that we can nurture student learning; the same perception applies when we observe teachers and when we want to foster professional growth and development.

Transmit respect for each individual

Be professional! Every college, business, and neighborhood has a rumor mill and they can be an effective means of communication. Just don't permit the rumor to turn into a gossip mill where you are discussing colleagues. Some institutions work solely on politics. Do your best to avoid the politics by keeping your department communication lines open and honest. Keep communication flowing, so that no one feels uninformed or left alone.

Build pride in each person's own accomplishments

Keep a positive attitude that seeks challenge as an opportunity. Corny as it may sound: too many good administrators are lost each year to the negatives they deal with each day. If you are negative, your level of accomplishment will directly follow the same line and soon you department will be right behind your leadership. Rather, stress quality and positive growth, even when budgets are bleak and problems running

wild. A setback is only a deviation in variance, something that will either disappear and not happen again, or something that will need to be controlled and can be changed. Reducing this variance supports a positive classroom attitude and performance.

Capitalize on their strengths

Look for strengths in each faculty member so that their self concept can grow, and when a weakness appears, it can be addressed easily in comparative terms with the known strength. A weakness in this case truly becomes a challenge for the individual, a future strength. We often look to use our best people whenever we need a committee or a task complete, but we need to include everyone so that all have ownership in the process of teaching and the future quality of the program.

Encourage self-competition

Each day we are placed in situations that make us the referee and the faculty are forced to compete for one score or another: travel money, new equipment, windowed offices, better classrooms, all create a sense of competition. Work to defuse these normal occurrences with challenges to individual growth. Clarify goals and options to all faculty and communicate your philosophy so that all share in the sense of fairness. Then move

on to the future. Challenge each to work to improve their own situation and help them do it. Sharing goals and self competition promotes instructional improvement.

Promote independence and responsibility

Empower faculty by giving them clear direction and appropriate resources, and then let them alone to do their job. That doesn't mean to ignore them nor to avoid providing feedback. I often have instructors who want me to read a student paper and affirm that "it's o.k." I gladly provide my opinion, and with it goes my lecture on classroom autonomy: the importance that the contract implies with regard to the teacher and his/her classroom. I believe this helps the instructor to feel that they are doing what they think is right, and more importantly, they know that I will support what they do as their contractual right. Supporting classroom freedom promotes excellent teaching.

Recognize sincere effort even if the end product is not the greatest

Every system will have its share of failures as well as successes. Keep all tasks in the proper perspective. When you make a mistake, admit it. When you are not sure if you are right, say so. If you know you are right, then stick to it, at least until the time when new, contradicting data may emerge. If we keep in perspective that mistakes are only opportunities to

learn, we can reduce the stress that fear of failure always seems to provide. We know this is true with our own work; we need also to keep the concept in mind as we approach the work of our faculty and staff.

Give feedback as soon as possible

Time often makes the best plans difficult to accomplish, especially when your job is a maze of plans all simultaneously moving in one direction or another. When I do classroom observations, I meet immediately afterward with the faculty member to discuss the review. If we cannot meet, I give at least one positive comment and one suggestion during the passing period. This at least provides some immediate feedback and a sense of what will be discussed when we do sit down together.

Too often I have requests that are put on hold and I lose sight of them in the many piles on my desk. I have no real solution to offer, but my efforts are always to keep responses quick and feedback direct and clear. In all ways, I keep the faculty first. Their concern may be only one of many, but it is crucial to them. To serve their need effectively, feedback on anything should be as soon as possible. Clear and timely feedback obviously promotes quality instruction.

Don't ignore areas of dissatisfaction: Get faculty suggestions for improving the situation

The fact that we all have a shared responsibility for the quality of our program should be enough to stifle any dissatisfaction. Not so. Some within every department will seek to be dissatisfied. Sometimes this feeling can lead to innovation and change; other times it can lead to discontent and poor performance. That's why I believe it is important to meet dissatisfaction openly and head on. Get anyone discontent with their environment to work to find new and unique ways to improve the situation. We all have the power to change, perhaps not immediately, but with time and patience, and with total involvement, we can seek to inspire a positive work environment which in turn can promote effective teaching.

Keep the communication channels open

Move around, listen to people, and ask questions.

Stress quality rather than quantity

Look for ways to improve the system by changing only one thing at a time. Involve faculty in the processes and they will share in the ownership of the product. Work through scope and sequence issues by seeking consensus and agreement. If

compromise is the only solution, then research both options and test their application at your institution. If everyone takes a part, then everyone also shares in the quality.

Use a variety of approaches: not all people act/react the same. Be ready to take a variety of roles from active domination to reflective support.

Know the personality styles you are dealing with on a daily basis. You can only help to assure quality teaching if you know how to effectively deal with the individual teacher. Test your perception: Keep notes on how faculty deal with stress, conflict, etc. Adjust your behavior to address the strengths and to reduce the possibility for conflict. Keep a journal to reflect on conflict and seek opportunities to avoid negative conflict through open communication.

Above all, provide a good model for their imitation--be human!

Keep your own goals clear and well known. Be a good teacher for the faculty you work with, even when you're not teaching formally in the classroom. Understand their needs and seek ways to help them reach their goals. That in itself will help to promote quality instruction and excellent department chairs.

The following case studies will provide an opportunity for group interaction and discussion.

CASE STUDY #1

Mark teaches developmental and college level math and is in his seventh year at Prairie Community College. Before Prairie, he had taught five years at a small high school where he had also served as the debate coach and assistant basketball coach. His undergraduate degree is in math education and his masters degree is in curriculum and instruction, a degree he finished just prior to being hired at Prairie.

For the last seven years, Mark has been one of the most popular math teachers because of his interest in student learning. He often meets with students in his office and even occasionally eats lunch with students in the cafeteria. Although some of Mark's colleagues are a little jealous of his friendly relationship with his students, they also respect Mark as a knowledgeable colleague who volunteers for committees, attends meetings, and contributes to the quality of the department.

When the position of chair opened, many faculty thought Mark would be the natural choice, but he didn't apply. Since your appointment to the chair position six months ago, you have noticed a change in Mark. He keeps his office door closed, his classroom observation was average, and his student feedback summary was less than average. You have approached Mark on several occasions and tried to establish a working relationship. Each time you have met with little interest shown on Mark's part.

On several occasions you have asked other colleagues about Mark's attitude, and on all occasions, the faculty member supported Mark completely, at times questioning your perception of a problem they did not believe exists.

<u>Some Possible Questions for Discussion</u>

What should your course of action be?

What would you expect the result of your actions?

If you take no action, what would you assume would be Mark's progression?

Choose sides and role play your next meeting with Mark; evaluate the quality of your responses from the viewpoint of the new chair as well as Mark's viewpoint.

CASE STUDY #2

Beverly is finishing her second year at Washington County Community College where she teaches composition and literature courses. This is the only teaching position she has had out of graduate school, and she is rapidly approaching a time when you, as the chair of the Humanities Division, will need to make a recommendation for contract renewal. If your recommendation is positive, Beverly will enter a two year tenure track period where by state law you must show just cause to not renew and she has the right to request a due process hearing. If your recommendation is to not renew, her contract simply ends with the school term and she does not have a right to a hearing.

You have been a chair for the last four years, and have had some difficulty with Beverly, generally a result of her demands. For example, when a tenured faculty member received a computer, Beverly demanded one. When she moved into a larger office, she demanded new furniture and additional storage. When she was involved with an ad hoc committee assignment, she openly complained about a colleague's attitude with several descriptive profanities: every committee member personally objected to you calling the behavior embarrassing and un professional. When giving suggestions related to instructional improvement based on classroom observation, student feedback, or student complaints, Beverly would question your opinion, deny any need for change, and label herself as a better judge of her own teaching. You have submitted letters to her file describing these encounters.

You decide there are three possible choices: do not renew, establish a mentoring plan to help Beverly improve as a teacher, or live with her as is. Discuss the possible outcomes, both positive and negative, with each choice. Which is the best?

Are there other considerations or choices that might improve the decision and outcome?

Role play your interview with Beverly.

CASE STUDY #3

A student calls you with the following request.
She was enrolled in a night class in your department but felt she was not receiving instruction at a level she thought appropriate. Examples she provided included: class dismissed an hour early, tests given at the beginning of each class over the text reading followed by discussion of the test answers, and no content provided outside the textbook. She applied for a tuition refund but was denied; however, with a letter from you confirming the above, a refund would be given. Obviously, she asks you to write the letter.

The instructor is in his second semester and primarily teaches Mass Media and Broadcasting courses during the day. He is young and relatively inexperienced. You have not received any other complaints about his instruction.

Should you accept or reject the request?

Plan out your course of action to deal with the student and instructor.

Role play your interaction with both the instructor and student. What are the "agendas" you need to address with this discussion?

CASE STUDY #4 (Dealing with Supervisor)

Your institution's policy is that students may change sections of the same course after the first week of the semester only if both sections are taught by the same instructor. Exceptions to this policy can be made at the discretion of the chair (or his/her supervisor). You believe strongly in this policy as your research has shown that students who miss the first week of class have a much higher attrition rate.

Three weeks into the semester you receive a request for a section change because of a work schedule conflict. The student is non-traditional and expresses a willingness to make up whatever work has been missed. However, you have refused at least a dozen similar requests and this one is no different. The student requests an appeal and you give her your supervisor's extension number. As soon as you hang up, you call your supervisor and leave a detailed message on his voice mail with the student's name, problem, and your decision explanation.

One week later you learn from the instructor that a student was added to her class because of a work conflict. She was also upset because of the time involved with helping the student catch up with assignments and class activities, a real strain on time. The same day you receive a memo sent to all chairs from your supervisor which states that work conflicts are reasons to approve section changes after the first week.

Should you do anything related to this case?

What would you gain/lose from the experience?

Role play your conversation with the supervisor and reflect on ways to reduce your personal anger.

CASE STUDY #5

As the chair of a large department, one of your responsibilities is to observe teachers on a regular basis. You enjoy this activity, especially with new instructors such as Linda, a part-time instructor you hired during the summer.

When you observed her class during the first semester, you found her delivery style to be weak and the content shallow. The students arrived late and several left early without any apparent justification or interest from the instructor. The organization seemed random without a clear focus. In your post observation interview, Linda listened intently, agreeing with your comments and suggestions. She offered excuses related to the new book, different student population, etc.

On your second observation near the end of the next semester, little had changed. Classroom management was still absent and the content came straight from the text, at times with the material read verbatim to the students. Your post conference was also a repeat of the previous semester. Linda complained of new family responsibilities since her husband lost his job and the demands of the teaching schedule at two other institutions on her time to prepare for class. Her continual response was: "the students were just down that day; we always have good classes."

At the end of the year, you evaluated student feedback and found Linda's to be above average. When looking at her grade distribution, there was a high attrition and failure rate, but the students passing received above average grades.

To promote instructional quality in your department, how do you deal with Linda?

What additional data should you consider?

Role play your interview with Linda--both using the decision to review and non-renew. Are their differences in your approach to the conversation?